

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3893
INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2082

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR LE US
SUBJ: MEETING WITH KATAEB MILITARY CHIEF, BASHIR GEMAYEL

1. AMBASSADOR AND DCM CALLED ON 97-YEAR OLD GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHBISHOP OF BEIRUT, ELIAS SALEEBY, MAY 2. FOLLOWING THIS
VISIT, THEY WERE GUESTS AT LUNCH GIVEN BY MSGR. GEOFRIL
SALEEBY, WHICH WAS ALSO ATTENDED BY KATAEB LEADERS BASHIR
GEMAYEL AND JOSEPH ABU SHARAF.

2. SHAYKH BASHIR OPENED THE CONVERSATION BY DISCUSSING HIS
FAMILY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAST TWO SOVIET AMBASSADORS. HE
DESCRIBED AMB AZIMOV, WHO LEFT LEBANON IN 1974, AS A PERSONAL
FRIEND OF SHAYKH PIERRE, WHO HAD EVEN GIVEN A DINNER IN HIS
HONOR. THE CURRENT AMBASSADOR, SOLDATOV, WAS VERY DIFFERENT.
HE WAS MUCH MORE HIGH-POWERED AND HAD PRACTICALLY NO CONTACT
WITH THE CHRISTIANS. MSGR. SALEEBY SAID HE HAD INQUIRED
AROUND AT THE TIME WHY THE USSR HAD SENT SUCH A STRONG AMB
TO LEBANON AND HAD BEEN TOLD IT WAS TO "BALANCE GODLEY."

3. DURING COURSE OF THE DISCUSSION, BASHIR DESCRIBED
AT LENGTH HIS VIEW OF LEBANON'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT.
HE SAID LEBANESE WERE WRONG TO BE CONSTANTLY ASKING
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OTHERS WHAT THEY THOUGHT FUTURE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK IN
LEBANON SHOULD BE AND WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN. PRIMARY
RESPONSIBILITY IN BOTH THESE CASES, BASHIR SAID, WAS
WITH LEBANESE AND THEY SHOULD BE TELLING OTHERS WHAT
THEY WANT AND SOLICITING THEIR SUPPORT.

4. IN DESCRIBING HIS OWN DESIDERATA, KEYNOTE OF BASHIR'S

PRESENTATION WAS OFT-REPEATED MARONITE THEME THAT THEY MUST HAVE SECURITY. HIS COMMUNITY AND HIS MILITIA, WHICH HAD LOST 2,500 MEN IN 1975-77, MUST BE IN A POSITION TO DEFEND THEMSELVES IF THE FIGHTING STARTED AGAIN. KAMAL JUNBLATT HAD THREATENED TO DRIVE THE MARONITES OUT OF LEBANON. THEY WERE THEREFORE UNWILLING TO FACE AGAIN A SITUATION WHERE, FOR EXAMPLE, ALL OF THE LEBANESE ARMY'S HEAVY WEAPONS WERE LOCATED OUTSIDE THE CHRISTIAN ZONE. HE WAS NOT OPPOSED TO REUNIFICATION OR NECESSARILY IN FAVOR OF PARTITION; RATHER, HE PROPOSED A TRANSITION PERIOD DURING WHICH THE PEOPLE WOULD DECIDE IF THEY COULD LIVE TOGETHER. IN THE MEANTIME, THE CHRISTIAN SECTOR MUST HAVE ITS DEFENSE CAPABILITY, ITS OWN FINANCIAL RESOURCES, ITS OWN AIRPORT, ITS OWN PORT, AND THE RIGHT TO MAINTAIN CONTACTS WITH FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS. HE VERY MUCH HOPED THAT REUNIFICATION WOULD COME ABOUT SINCE HE CONSIDERED THE AKKAR, THE BEKAA AND THE SOUTH AS INTEGRAL PARTS OF LEBANON, BUT IF IT SHOULD PROVE IMPOSSIBLE, OR IF A NEW NASSER SHOULD ARISE AND PERSUADE THE MUSLIMS THAT THEY ARE MORE ARAB THAN LEBANESE, THE CHRISTIANS MUST HAVE THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES TO ENABLE THEM TO SURVIVE.

5. SHAYKH BASHIR WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN EDUCATION AND TALKED AT LENGTH ABOUT THE NEED FOR FIRST-CLASS UNIVERSITY FACILITIES IN EAST BEIRUT. HE REFERRED SPECIFICALLY TO THE AUB EXTENSION DIVISION IN EAST BEIRUT WHICH NOW HAS 400 STUDENTS, AND EXPRESSED

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GREAT UNHAPPINESS AT REPORTS THAT THIS BRANCH OF AUB MIGHT BE CLOSED. HE ARGUED THAT AS LONG AS IT WAS NOT SAFE FOR HIM TO COME TO WEST BEIRUT, AUB HAD THE DUTY TO MAINTAIN A BRANCH IN THE CHRISTIAN REGION. AMBASSADOR AND DCM POINTED OUT THAT SUCH A STEP COULD BE CONSIDERED A MOVE IN THE DIRECTION OF PARTITION.

6. COMMENT: BASHIR PRETENDED NOT TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE KIND OF TEMPORARY, DE FACTO PARTITION HE ADVOCATES WOULD MAKE MEANINGFUL REUNIFICATION MORE DIFFICULT. PARKER

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